

The Basilica Mary Labyrinth

The Basilica of Saint Mary's labyrinth is dedicated to Mary, the blessed mother of Jesus. Unlike a maze, which befuddles and confuses the walker, a labyrinth takes us on a journey of discovery. Christian labyrinths are like miniature pilgrimages. A labyrinth's winding path mimics the road of life, with its unexpected turns: walking it helps us to reflect on our life.

People have long employed labyrinths as a form of contemplative prayer. We invite you to walk the Basilica's labyrinth while contemplating your own pilgrim journey through life.

We further invite you to recall the life paths of Jesus and Mary as you walk the labyrinth. Saying the rosary is also a perfect accompaniment.

As you walk the "long arms" of the Mary labyrinth, consider how God's love embraces us. Nearing the center, where the labyrinth's circular paths enfold us, reflect on how God nurtures us and how we can nurture others as instruments of God's peace and justice.

Everyone is welcome to enjoy the Basilica Mary Labyrinth.

*O, Blessed Virgin Mary, as we walk, hear our prayers
both spoken and unheard.*

Labyrinth History

Labyrinths have a long history in many faiths and cultures. The earliest description of walking a labyrinth comes from Egypt, over 4,000 years ago. Ancient labyrinths show up on coins and frescos in Minoan Crete; Egyptian seals and amulets; Roman pavements; rock art at Goa, India; and as designs on Hopi, Navajo, and Pima basketry in the Americas.

We find the earliest known Christian labyrinth at the 4th century Basilica of Reparatus in Algeria, North Africa. The flowering of Christian labyrinths came in the Middle Ages when many churches incorporated labyrinths into their designs. The most famous, and the most copied, of these labyrinths is the one at Chartres Cathedral, France.

Labyrinths were popular in churches in the Middle Ages because of their association with pilgrimage. People who were unable to journey to distant holy sites walked labyrinths for the same spiritual benefits. The center of the labyrinth is known as "Jerusalem"—a popular earthly pilgrimage site and a foreshadowing of the heavenly "New Jerusalem" in the life to come.

Christians traditionally walked labyrinths on the eve of baptism or confirmation; as an aid to contemplative prayer; and as an illustration of life's pilgrim journey.

Walking the Labyrinth

All pilgrimages begin with a first step. It's the act of walking that makes you a pilgrim—in life or on a labyrinth. Typically you start at the beginning, take your time following the path inward, pause in the center, then turn around and journey out to complete your pilgrimage.

Open your mind and heart as you walk. Let yourself experience the changes of direction. You may get turned around, but you are never lost: trust that the path will lead you where you need to go. As you follow the path, let yourself relax. Take slow, steady steps to quiet the mind and enable full-body prayer.

The only labyrinth rule is to respect other pilgrims you meet. Keep in mind that people travel both directions on the same path—to and from "Jerusalem." You may need to step off the path to accommodate another user who may be in a wheelchair. If you do not have time to walk the entire labyrinth, you may respectfully walk across the path to or from the center.

Walk at your own pace. Spend as much time as you like in "Jerusalem". Journey out and bring the peace of your labyrinth walk into the pilgrimage of your daily life.